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ABSTRACT

More than 20 alternative curriculum models for early childhood education have been developed. One of the more recently developed is the Enabler Model, which is intended to provide regular on-site support, guidance and assistance to a local community for the implementation of preschool, day care and/or other early childhood programs. The Enabler Model has two phases: (1) the period of initiation, and (2) the period involving on-going maintenance of the Head Start Program. During the first period, the Enabler meets with all community groups to be involved in the program. During the second period, the Enabler's role shifts toward helping the local groups realize their goals. In sum, the six basic functions of the enabler are: supplier of information, interpreter of the program, link between all segments of the community, a source of support, a demonstration agent, and a neutralizer of conflict. It is probably easier to implement the Enabler Model when the Enabler does not live and work in the community to be served. (CK)

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# THE ENABLER MODEL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

by

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# The Enabler Model for Early Childhood Programs

Lilian G. Katz

One of the most salient aspects of early childhood education during recent years has been the development of more than twenty alternative curriculum models.[1] In general, these models are plans for organizing the instruction of young children which have been carefully developed in research or demonstration projects. The Follow Through Project for the primary grades, and the Planned Variation Experiment for Head Start are major research and development efforts supported by HEW, and designed to give us new information about using various models being studied.

In the spring of 1970, the National Office of Head Start[2] saw the need to test a new kind of early childhood model as part of the Planned Variation Experiment. Rather than offer a community a predesigned experimental curriculum, the basic plan of the Enabling Model was to provide the supportive assistance of an early childhood specialist to help local Head Start staff and parents do better what they wanted to do in their own programs. Although the original plan was developed for Head Start centers, the model can be adapted for use in many other types of early childhood

1. Parker compiled descriptions of 18 models in R. Parker "An Overview of Cognitive and Language Programs for 3, 4, and 5 Year Old Children". Southeastern Education Laboratory, Atlanta, Ga., April 1970. See also "Follow Through", HEW, Oct. 1969; F. Foster (Ed.) "Follow Through In Focus." State of New Jersey Department of Education, 1968. J. Klein "Planned Variation in Head Start Programs" Children, Jan.-Feb. 1971, pp.8-12.

2. In the Office of Child Development, HEW.

projects.

## Objectives of the Enabler Model

The overall purpose of the Enabler Model is to provide regular on-site support, guidance and other necessary assistance to a local community for the implementation of its preschool, day care or other early childhood programs. The model was developed with four major principles in mind:

1. The Enabler's support and guidance is directed to helping the community to achieve its own goals and purposes.
2. The Enabler's assistance is offered in a manner designed to encourage and, indeed, enable local early childhood program leaders and participants to solve their program's problems on their own.
3. The Enabler helps the local staff and parents to develop relationships and build bridges to their own local resources and agencies.
4. The Enabler's assistance is offered to local staffs and parents in a way that helps them discover and maximize their own inherent strengths and talents.

Accepted as given is the principle that each community and its early childhood program are unique, having individual patterns of strengths and weaknesses, resources and needs, goals and purposes. A key assumption is that a preconceived and prespecified curriculum model brought into a community from the outside may be congenial for a given community, or it may be insufficiently sensitive to the community's unique qualities and patterns. Although all curriculum models can be adapted for local implementation, it was hoped that the Enabler Model would show the value of a non-prescriptive approach to helping those who make early childhood programs go.

A related principle stemmed from our assumptions about the ways people learn and grow. It is always easy, especially for those with extensive experience, to tell others how to run their programs. But it is reasonable to assume that the practice of telling people what to do (such as imposing prespecified curricula) encourages local centers to depend upon outside expertise for their learning. Such a learned pattern of dependence on outsiders may rob the parents and staff of the opportunity to discover and develop their own talents and potentials. Another way of saying this is that the more often community leaders are persuaded to accept a predetermined program, the less often they reach down into their own resources and strengthen their own understanding and skills. This latter point is related to the assumption that more meaningful learning occurs when people seek advice and assistance--as they experience the need for it--than when the need for help is identified by outsiders.

Another related principle is that growth and learning are affected by the quality of the relationships between learners and helpers. Qualitative aspects of relationships are difficult to define, and descriptions easily become clichés. The quality we consider essential for enduring growth is mutual respect. We therefore sought to fashion a strategy by which we could help all those involved with the early childhood program to achieve <u>their own purposes</u> by treating their purposes with respect. Macdonald makes a useful and interesting distinction between purposes and objectives which applies here:

> Purposes arise out of the transaction of the subjective and objective conditions of experience. Objectives, in contrast, are projected into situations and used as bases for shaping... the roles of individuals in relation to things, ideas and other people...Purposes arise <u>from</u> the subject who, it is implied, intentionally seeks some end. Purposes by this definition cannot arise from outside the situation, whereas objectives may be predetermined and used to shape situations prior to the transaction. (p. 25)

Helping the local program people to better achieve their own purposes, rather than imposing prespecified curriculum objectives stems from another related assumption. It is frequently suggested in the educational literature today that our major problem is to train the untrained, to give skills and knowledge to those who lack them. But this phrasing of the problem of education is inappropriate. We know how to make other people 'do' or 'learn' what is considered to be in their interests. The history of human societies provides ample evidence that a wide range of methods has been used successfully to make young and old 'do' and in fact 'learn' what they would not otherwise have chosen to. The essential problem is really how to help people to acquire the skills, knowledge and personal resources they need in such a way as to safeguard, sustain, protect and indeed enhance their own dignity, their sense of self respect, self worth and personal power. When the problem is phrased in this way, the key characteristic of a helping model must be respect for the purposes and goals of those who wish to be helped.

Another assumption (or perhaps we should call it a working hypothesis) involved in our planning was that in an early childhood program the way the administrators treat the teachers is the way the teachers treat the children. If this hypothesis is valid, then the relationships between administrators and teachers which are marked by trust and respect may characterize the relationships teachers develop with the children and their parents. We assumed that if we wanted to encourage relationships of mutual respect and trust between administrators and teachers, then the relationship between our Enabler and the local staff must also be marked by these desirable qualities. (See Bidwell, 1970 for an interesting discussion of the problems of trust).

From these provisional assumptions we derived a concept of the Enabler based on a clinical rather than an experimental approach to problem solving. The key elements of the concept are: recognition of the uniqueness of each community; the community's specification of its own goals and purposes; the opportunity for program leaders to consult the Enabler in terms of their own needs and perceptions, and the Enabler's assignment to advise program leaders in terms of his (or her) own background of experience and knowledge of early childhood education.

## The Enabler's Role

At the outset, we visualized the Enabler Model as having two phases: the first one consisting of the period of initiation, and the second one involving on-going maintenance of the Head Start program.

### Phase I. Initiation of the Program

During the initial period of the Enabler's work (generally expected to occur before the opening of classes) the Enabler meets with all community groups to be involved and served by the early childhood program. These groups include parents, Head Start staff and volunteers; social, medical and nutritional workers; public school personnel; CAP and neighborhood representatives and all others concerned with the program. In the course of these informal and semi-formal discussions, the Enabler encourages and facilitates the expression of the goals and purposes of everyone involved. When necessary, the Enabler helps these local groups to clarify and articulate their goals and purposes and to reconcile those which tend to be conflicting or incompatible. Most groups express their goals in very broad terms. It is probably helpful to program planners and participants when their goals are reasonably well specified as well as realistic. Helping participants

PS 005886

to refine their goals so that they are developmentally as well as culturally appropriate for the age and ethnic group of children to be served is also part of the Enabler's role during the initiation phase.

Once a consensus concerning goals and purposes is achieved the Enabler then helps parents and staff members to answer the question: What do we have to do in order to implement our own goals? During the discussions of this question, the Enabler helps participants to consider a wide range of problems in implementation. Problems concerning the sharing of responsibility for policy development, personnel practices, staff structure and the distribution of specific tasks and their coordination are explored. Plans for the preparation of the classrooms, the transportation system, outdoor facilities, needed materials and equipment, daily program activities and the overall style of the curriculum are thought through in terms of the goals and purposes the community members themselves want to achieve.

Phase II. Support and Maintenance of the Program

With the sense of direction and some basic plans and intentions spelled out during the initiation phase, the Enabler's role shifts toward helping the local groups realize their goals. In the initial planning we thought that the Enabler should visit the community for four days each month. The actual length of each visit was to be planned in terms of the number of classes per site, and the distances between centers. We reasoned that sufficient time should be allowed so that the Enabler could visit each class on every monthly return to the community, and should have enough time to talk to all staff members and parent representatives regularly. Our initial planning specified six classes for each Enabler, allowing enough time for him to develop a sensitivity to the community and its unique problems and

needs. As yet there is no reliable way to forsee either the optimal length or the needed frequency of the Enabler's visits.

At the outset we identified six basic functions for the Enabler during the maintenance phase. These are described briefly below:

1) The Enabler as supplier of information.

   This function includes helping the parents and staff to obtain information, knowledge and ideas as needed. Included may be information about useful films, inexpensive equipment, free materials, workshops and conferences to attend, or tracking down local expertise to help deal with specific problems.

2) The Enabler as a link between all segments of the wider community.

   Under this heading we include aspects of the Enabler's work by which he (or she) helps to alert each community group (e.g. parents, school district staffs, county health services, community action or citizen's groups,) to what each needs from the other in order to strengthen the total early childhood program effort. Through direct contact with group leaders, the Enabler can help to clarify to different groups what each might do to back up the other.

3) The Enabler as an interpreter of the program in terms of its own goals.

   A most important function of the Enabler is to help local staff and parents to realize their own objectives. To do this, the Enabler makes regular observations of all aspects of program implementation. When appropriate the Enabler shares positive impressions and helps to interpret observations in terms of how the events converge to meet or to contradict the program's goals.

4) The Enabler as a source of support.

In addition to the technical and informational assistance which the Enabler offers he (or she) also provides moral support and encouragement. He shares an appreciation of local difficulties and adversities. He takes note and shares his impressions of the strengths he has observed in all participants, illustrates and describes positive efforts of one group or person to another.

5) The Enabler as a demonstration agent.

From time to time, the Enabler may be called upon to demonstrate skills or techniques. This demonstration may be achieved through occasional workshops, or informal discussions at staff meetings, or on-the-spot as events evolve. Sometimes the Enabler may want to bring in a nearby specialist to consult, or to introduce an appropriate film.

6) The Enabler as a neutralizer of conflict.

Groups organized for community endeavors often experience internal dissension and conflict. An Enabler must resist efforts to engage him on one side or another, but rather respond to these situations in such a way as to redirect the energies of those involved toward their own basic goals and purposes.

Summary

In the preceding paragraphs the broad dimensions of the Enabler Model have been outlined. It is too early to tell which preconceived elements were on target, and which key factors were omitted. Some preliminary hunches are emerging concerning desirable qualities of Enablers and their enabling styles.

One strong hunch is that knowledgable Enablers must have extensive experience in early childhood education. The kind of deep insight into what makes programs go and grow that comes from experience will help Enablers respond to the many types of help requested. Enablers must also be able to resist the temptation to give advice too quickly. Instead, time must be allowed for local program people to judge when they are ready to use the skills and resources available through the Enablers. Enablers are more likely to succeed when they respect and appreciate the potential abilities, talents and strengths in all people.

It is probably easier to implement the Enabler Model when the Enabler does not live and work in the community to be served. Most early childhood specialists are already known to the early childhood programs in their own communities, and their own preferences and biases about programs are probably clearly identified. However, a central feature of the Model is that the Enabler brings his specialized knowledge and skills to bear on achieving program goals and preferences which may be different from his own.

An early childhood program has many dimensions, and the assistance of many kinds of specialists is needed to keep the program quality high. For the early childhood specialist in the Enabling role, the point of entry is the quality of the day to day experiences provided for the children. The events in the classroom provide the heart beat and blood pressure readings in this clinical approach. Helping to maintain a fully "healthy" program may mean sharing information, demonstrating techniques, helping find other specialists, interpreting sources of conflict and reconciling

differences among the adults, it may also mean helping teachers to deepen their understanding of how children grow and sometimes helping administrators to understand what teachers need and how their growth is enhanced. Each specialist has his own frame of reference: the nutritional component, social and psychological services, public health, and so forth. But it is the Enabler who uses all special knowledge to improve the quality of the children's daily experiences in early childhood programs.

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